



News Release

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Council Delays Approving Snapper Grouper Amendments 8 and 9 for Public Hearing

Additional meetings scheduled to discuss issues

The Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel met jointly with the Council's Snapper Grouper and Controlled Access Committees at the April meeting to discuss options to take to public hearing for Amendments 8 and 9. Due to the complexity of the issues, discussions were lengthy and there was not enough time to completely review the documents.

The council has scheduled an additional meeting of the advisory panel and committees May 20-22 in Charleston, SC, to allow the groups more time to review the documents and come to some consensus on which options to recommend to the council to take to public hearing.

With regard to the options paper for Amendment 9, most of the discussion centered around looking at various ways to limit the number of participants in the snapper grouper fishery. The council has imposed bag and minimum size limits to help conserve overfished species in the snapper grouper complex, but the size and capacity of fleets fishing for these species continue to be significantly higher than the stocks can sustain on a long-term basis.

Currently there are 12 options present in the options paper for limiting the number of participants. The advisory panel could not reach a consensus on the options provided in the document, because some members felt current options would eliminate active snapper grouper fishermen who have complied with reporting requirements. They also suggested the council's current preferred alternative, to limit entry based on the July 30, 1991 control date, would not be feasible because snapper grouper permits and logbook reports were not in place at that time, making it difficult to verify who would qualify.

The advisory panel submitted a proposal for an additional option to include in the document, which would limit entry to those who can demonstrate landings of snapper grouper species as of January 1, 1996. This option would also implement an effort limitation by establishing endorsements based on the level of participation. Though this option would cap the number of participants in the fishery, it may not reduce the initial number to any significant level.

Council staff has revised options paper 9 to include the advisory panel option and to incorporate new data.

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Council's May Meeting Schedule

These meetings will take place at the Town and Country Inn, 2008 Savannah Highway, Charleston, South Carolina 29407; telephone: 1-(800) 334-6660 or (803) 571-1000.

**Monday, May 20, 1:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
and**

Tuesday, May 21, 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon

The Snapper Grouper and Controlled Access Committees will meet with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel to review a videotape on the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern.

They will also review the draft options paper for Amendments 8 and 9 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan, and develop advisory panel recommendations for options to be included for public hearing. The Controlled Access Committee will approve Amendment 9 for public hearing.

Monday, May 20, 7:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

The Snapper Grouper and Controlled Access Committees will meet informally with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel and South Atlantic gag grouper fishermen to discuss gag grouper management.

**Tuesday, May 21, 1:30 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.
and**

Wednesday, May 22, 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon

The Snapper Grouper Committee will meet with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel.

The Snapper Grouper Committee will approve Amendment 8 for public hearing.

Wednesday, May 22, 1:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

The Executive and Finance Committees will meet jointly to review and develop recommendations for the Fiscal Year 1997 council activities schedule and develop the Fiscal Year 1997 budget. They will also review the balance of Fiscal Year 1996 activities.

Council to Consider Gag Grouper Management

The Snapper Grouper and Controlled Access Committees will meet informally with the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel and gag grouper fishermen in the South Atlantic region on Monday, May 20 from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.

Discussions at the meeting will center around results of the 1996 Gag Stock Assessment and what gag grouper producers have been experiencing over the past several years in this fishery. The Assessment indicates a serious decline in gag grouper stocks, though Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel members have reported seeing an increase in numbers.

The outcome of these discussions should assist the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council in obtaining a better understanding of the situation in this fishery, and to formulate management measures that would ensure its sustainability in the long term, while minimizing undue hardship to fishermen.

The public is welcome and encouraged to attend this meeting.

Council's Executive and Finance Committees to meet in May

Congress recently passed an annual budget for the eight regional fishery management councils of \$10.2 million, an increase of \$1.7 million from last year.

The South Atlantic Council's Executive and Finance Committees will meet May 22, 1996 from 1:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. to look at council activities for the balance of this fiscal year and begin developing the Fiscal Year 1997 budget.

Council to Consider Seasonal Closure of Mid-Shelf Species in Snapper Grouper Fishery

The options paper for Amendment 8 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan proposes measures to reduce fishing mortality other than the limited entry program proposed in options paper 9.

At the April meeting, the Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel met with the Snapper Grouper Committee to review the options in Amendment 8 and to recommend which of the options should be included in the public hearing document.

While advisory panel members recognized that some of the snapper grouper stocks are in bad shape, they were not sure if traditional management, such as trip and size limits and gear restrictions would lead to recovery of these stocks.

General opinion was that such regulations, most implemented within the past three years, needed more time to impact the stocks. Advisory panel members also expressed the belief that limiting the number of participants

would effectively control effort in the fishery, thus eliminating the need for other measures, as proposed in Amendment 8.

Management of the snapper grouper complex is difficult because the management unit consists of 23 different species, each with individual biological characteristics.

These species occur in three depths: shallow, mid-depth, and deep water. Data received from the National Marine Fisheries Service indicates that several of the shallow and mid-depth species are in serious trouble in terms of depletion.

One possible way to reduce fishing mortality of these species is to prohibit harvest of the mid-depth fishery for three months of the year, to allow the stocks to recover. One issue the council must consider is that if effort in the fishery is increased either before or after the closure, it would not be effective. This is only one of several options included in the document.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, one of eight regional councils, conserves and manages fish stocks from three to 200 miles off North and South Carolina, Georgia and east Florida shores.



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